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THE VOICE OF NATURE.

A Drama

In One Act

by

Mrs Ivar Levingahn.

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Characters:

Dr Theodor Langley.

Mrs Harriet Langley.

Little Irene.

Sitting room in Doctor Langley's country home. Season of year: midwinter; time of day: early morning.

As curtain rises Mrs L. enters with two blank-books in her hand, throws them on table, and then goes to window and pulls up blind, permitting the early morning sun to shine in. She then looks over at gratefire with a pleased countenance.

Mrs L. Well, I did'nt expect to have such a roaring fire greet me. She walks over and holds hands over grate. I suppose Fanny had a horrible dream and was afraid to stay in bed until eight o'clock. Holds hands over grate as if delighted with fire. I expected to write this morning with a heavy wrap over my shoulders, but now I shall write with perfect ease. The room is delightfully warm, and no one to disturb me for some time. I am quite sure Theodor will sleep till late; he did not get in till almost morning. I do wish these country people would send for the doctor during the day; it would give me such a glorious time to write. She walks to table. Poor, foolish dears. They sometimes walk over here, when they're most fit for bed; but then, they won't trouble the doctor as long as they can manage to get here. She picks a few papers from table and reads: A man must needs a friend after he has been his own enemy. She looks up thoughtfully. I meant to get that in. Meditating. Well, I will try it.

She pulls out chair, sits down and reads again: A man must needs a freind after he has been his own enemy. She looks up. I can not put that in his lines, neither can I put it in hers, but a pause, but I might ——she opens blank book and runs over few pages, stops at one, mumbling in low tone. No, it won't do here. She runs over a few more leaves, stops and reads in low tone again. Perhaps—she places hand on forehead as if to force a thought, then takes pen and begins to write in a hurried manner.

Enter Dr Langley. He stands in doorway a few moments; then walks slowly behind her chair to fire and warms hands. He turns round, looks at her steadily, takes cigar from pocket, lights it and stands puffing, all the while looking at her.

Dr L. [illegible]

She does not know I am in the room; at least, I hope so. I shouldn't care to be convinced she would deliberately ignore me for that play. How she loves her work, and how I despise it He puffs at the cigar. It has taken up so much room in her heart that it is crowding me out. But it must stop. He calls: Harriet. She does not hear him. Again in louder tone: Harriet.

Mrs L. looks up at him, pen in hand, I did'nt know you were in the room.

Dr L. I know that.

She puts down pen and walks over to him.

Mrs L. You look very tired, dear. I thought you would sleep very late

this morning. You did not get in until after four.

Dr L. How do you know it was after four when I got in. You don't keep a light in your room.

Mrs L. No; but I could'nt sleep very well, so I turned on the light that I might read.

Dr L. Harriet, ypu look as if you needed more rest than I do. Come, dear, sit in this chair. He pushes large arm chair over to fire and holds out hand to her, then leads her gently to chair. She sits down. He He sits down on arm of chair and looks at her. I wish you would tell me why you just told me that untruth. You know, dear, that your love for your pen has made me very unhappy; but I have always felt I could trust you. And now---

Mrs L. And now you will begin to lose faith. Well, I acknowledge I did tell you a falsehood; but the fault is your own, because you treat me like a child, whose most indulgent parent do not permit her to study, because she is not strong. But nature has made her a lover of study, and as Nature is fire proof, waterproof and even dust proof, the child is compelled to lie to the parent, who does not understand. And not alone do you force me to lie but you force me to steal— time from my sleep.

Dr L. You are right. You steal time from your sleep, a very precious time it is; for loss of sleep is loss of strength, and the loss of your strength means so much to your husband and your childre Ah, Harriet; I have often heard you say: Nature is a blessing.

Is there any blessing on earth as great as that of motherhood? And yet, he gets up from arm of chair, you are happier with those scraps of paper,which do not live and do not care whether you live.

Mrs L. looks at him pleadingly. Theodor, you don't understand. To you they are only scraps of paper; but to me they live and keep me alive. They feed my very soul and comfort my heart. They bring life into my heart and life and loy into my hopes. Withe out them life would be the same as it would be without you and our children: a life without hope.

Dr L. But have you ever stopped to think that while your work brings you so much joy and happiness that we, your husband and children, are starving, yes, starving for the sound of your voice, for the care of your hand and the love of your heart?

Mrs L. looks at him. Then you are not like the indulgent parent, but like the farmer, who sends his cow to a good pasture, that she may give good milk. Ah, Theodor, your love is a selfish love, for you love yourself first.

Dr L. goes nearer to her. Harriet, you don't know what you are saying. You know I would gladly die to make you happy—

Mrs L. with a sarcastic smile. You would die to make me happy, and yet you complain because I do not devote every moment of my time to you.

Dr L. That proves how much I love you.

Mrs L. stands up. That proves how much you love yourself. Why, the very meaning of the word love is sacrifice. And sacrifice? I will tell you. When I was a little girl I had the greatest

horror for doctors, for my poor mother died durind a surgical operation. My horror did not decrease as I gerw older, on the contrary, it increased year by year until I was eighteen, when I met you. You were then studying law; it was your father's wish. We learned to love each other. Then came your father's death, after wich you came to me and said: Harfiet, I was not cut out to be a lawyer; I am going to study medicine. That news was a great shock to me; for at that moment I could see you xstanding with a glittering blade cutting human flesh. Slowly but bravely I looked up into your eyes; I saw how much in earnest you were,and at that moment I proved to myself that I really loved you, for I crept into your arms and said: Theodor, your wish is mine. After we were married I even insisted upon sterilizing your instruments myself, for I wanted to become friends with them. All my husband's dear friends are also mine. And today as I pass that cabinet each instrument seems to say you have learned to love me because you love him, who loves us. That is love, sacrifice.

Dr L. But, my dear girl, a man must follow the profession he loves
D best,for the support of his family depends upon it. The more he loves his work the easier it appears to him, and the more his family benefits by it; but with you it is quite different. Yout family does not wish to benefit by your work. You can only succeed in slipping away from us; I am gradually losing my wife and the children their mother. He puts his arm around her.

Harriet, don't insist in ruining your life and mine. I know you are dreaming of success; I have no doubt that the sound of applause is at this very moment ringing in your ears. You picture the great glory of success; but how many like yourself have died with but that picture before them.

Mrs L. They died like brave soldiers, who fought for their country.

Dr L. But soldiers are all men. While they are fighting, their mothers, wives or sweethearts are at home, praying for them, and caring for their loved ones. Come, girl, give up your fight come back to your husband and children, who want you more than you will ever know.

Mrs L. I have never left you, and never shall. I have tried hard to do my duty; your wish was always mine.

Dr L. But my greatest wish is that you give up writing. A pause. The wind is howling, and is heard plainly.

Mrs L. walks over to window and looks out. Listen to the wind. Those wretched little shanties up on the hill will no doubt lose their chimneys, and so many children will be left homeless. Now, why don't you go out there and demand the wind shall cease?

Dr L. astonished. Are you losing your senses?

Mrs L. No, I am only asking of you what you want me do do. Can you stop that wind from blowing? Can you keep a fish alive without water; can you keep a sparrow alive in a cage? Just so can you keep me from my pen. Oh, Theodor, don't look at me like that. I know my voice sounds somewhat strange to you; but it is not merely the voice of a human being you now hear; it is the voice

of Nature, a voice that cannot be stilled.

Dr L. bows his head, as he slowly crosses room over to door;

Dr L. looks at wife, and says sadly: We are both in need of God's helping hand. He opens door and leaves.

Mrs L. stands in the same position looking at door, through which he left.

Mrs L. So, this is the end of the battle; my last hope is dead. I have proof now that he can never be convinced, until— until I sell a play. A sarcastic while. Sell a play. How can I sell a play that I dare not write? A pause. Dare not; am I then a slave? Have I no right to my opinion, or am I a child that does not know. A pause; then in determined tone. I am neither slave nor child; I shall finish my play in spite of all. She walks to table, opens drawer, throws about some papers, picks one and reads: Read your play carefully; found it interesting but at the present state of the market we cannot dispose of it. She looks up. I understand. My "Readjustment" is one of the good old-fashioned dramas; but people of today want something of today. Well, here it is. She holds up book. I have begun it and I will finish it. But not here; I must go away to some place where I can find peace. A pause; she looks around to see if she had been overheard. Go away. She looks frightened. How can I go away and leave--, and yet, why not? They may miss me for a while; but then they will gain by it in the end, like babies who are forced to take their medicine to get well.

They will reap the beautiful harvest I have sowed for them; then they'll soon forget. A pause. Harriet, you must go before your courage forsakes you; go, before you see or speak to any one. She sits down, takes paper and pen and begins to write: My dear husband. I am going where I will have peace to write— She looks up. Oh, how my heart beats; I am afraid I can't carry this through. Stops to think. If this plan fail me I can never finish my play. Oh, no, no, I would rather die than give it up. I will go. Reads again: I am going where I will have peace to write. Will return when it is sold. Yours Harriet. She leaves paper on table; gets up and looks around room as if frightened at something. Opens door leading to hall, takes hat and cloak from rack and puts them on. Stops to think. Suppose some one should see me? A pause. I'll say I am going for a walk. She buttons cloak; runs to table, takes blank book and all papers, except note on table. Rolls them up, goes to door. She looks over at mantle, and then goes over to it; takes up first one little picture in frame, then another, takes out pictures and puts them in pocket. Puts frames back on mantle, walks back to door, opens door and leaves.

Silence for a few moments. Then a voice is heard calling: "Irene, you will be late to school, if you don't hurry." Irene is heard answering: "I'll be off in a minute; I want to kiss mother before I go."

Irene comes bouncing in, books in hand; looks around. Not here? Father said she was in the sitting room; perhaps she went to the store expecting to get back before I left; but Punch is so slow

waiting on customers——, she notices note on desk.—Now, mother must have been in an awful hurry, or she would'nt leave part of her book on the table. She looks up. I'd love to read it; but mother says I can't read or write a play till I am eighteen She sighs. I wish I were eighteen; I love to write a play. She looks at clock. Oh, it's twenty minutes of nine; I am late sure. She takes paper, opens drawer quickly, puts in paper and closes it; locks up. I'll get an extra kiss for that at noon time. She runs to door opens it and startles. Oh, there is the hearse for poor little Isabel; and her mama does'nt know she is dead. What a horrid mama she must be to go away and not tell her little girl where she is going. And now she is dead, and she will never see her any more. Poor little Isabel, she cries, then looks up. I am late for school now, but I just can't help it. She walks out slowly, drying her eyes.

A few seconds silence. Mrs L. comes in, pale and full of terror grasps chair for support.

Mrs L. in low, choking voice. Only a little while ago I heard him say we are both in need of God's helping hand. His prayer was answered; for He sent that little white hearse so I might see it. As I stood ticket in hand, it passed my face; my eyes followed it as if drawn by some invisible power. It stopped at Carson's door. Not until then was I reminded poor little Isabel was dead; she died without a kiss from her mother, and today she will be buried without a tear from a mother's eye on her little coffin. I fansied I heard people say: that wretch is the cause of her own child's death. She broke her by leaving her. //

Then I heard the whistle of the train; it sounded like the t telling of death-bells. On and on it came, till it stopped righ before me; a rough voice shouted: there's your train, madam. He did not recognize me, with this heavy veil. I did not dare speak; so without a word I turned and fled for home. A pause. Home. She wails! Will it ever be the same home again; will he ever forgive me? Oh, I was mad, mad for my play, or I would never have dreamt, he would forgive me. She looks around. Perhaps he has not read the note. She pulls hat and cloak off opens door and throws them on rack, closes door, and stands there knob of door still in hand, to weak to move. She stops to think. I wonder if he has— Oh, I must— I must get courage to see for myself. She staggers to table, and is afraid to look. She hesitates, then takes one quick glance. Gone. She places hand over mouth to suppress a scream; grasps at table for support. A pause. Too late. A pause. But he must listen to me, he must understand; I meant it for the best. Her eyes wander to window. Oh, my God, the sight of that hearse will drive me mad. She staggers over to window and draws down shade Footsteps are heard. She walks over to arm chair, rests arm on back, and stands as if prepared for the worst.

Dr L. enters, looks around. Why is it so dark? He goes over to window.

Mrs L. rushes forward with great effort, and takes hold of his arm. Don't pull up the shade, at least, not yet.

Dr L. Oh, I understand. The sight of little Isabel's funeral has un-nerved you.

Mrs L. hesitatingly. Yes, yes.

Dr L. Well, I don't blame you for that; I feel badly myself. That child's death was indeed a very sad one. I am afraid her father will soon join her; he is far from a streng man, and his wife's desertion followed by the death of his child is more than he can bear for any length of time. Mrs L. is standing in the same place, her suspence and agony is depicted on her face. Dr L. moving towards table sighs. What a pity such women will contin to live.

Mrs L. as if choking. Stop; for God's sake stop, I can't bear it.

Dr L. goes over to her. Harriet, are you ill?

Mrs L. slowly. And if I were ill, would you care?

Dr L. smiles. I hope you don't believe that your foolish little act of a while ago would so change me.

Mrs L. in great surprise. Then you are convinced that I meant no harm?

Dr L. Why, my dear, you have the same right to express your opinion as I have to express mine. Mrs L. looks as if she had just realized the situation. Nothing depends on what we think, it rests with what we do. She looks at him in a strange manner, but does not speak. Harriet, let me pull up the shade, I want to see your face. You need not look out.

Mrs L. Very well, dear. In a whisper. Pull it up.

Dr L. pulls up shade, looks at her. My God, girl, what ails you?

He puts his arm around her. Tell me, dear, what has gone wrong

Mrs L. Nothing, dear, nothing; only— a pause— I was afraid—, she looks around helplessly—I thought, I, never mind what I though Only hold me in your arms, while I tell you I have come back to my husband and my children.

Dr L. embraces her. Harriet, my wife, I understand it all now. The death of that little child— he points to window— has taught you the duty of motherhood. Come, dear, sit down near the fire, you are so cold. He leads her over to fire; she sits down in chair. There now, I will get something for your nerves. He goes over to closet, takes out bottle, and prepares small dose in glass. He gives her the glass. There, drink this ; drink it quick. She drinks. Now I will leave you to yourself I know you want to be alone, until you are quite yourself again He goes to door, turns and looks at her. In low tone: I am afraid— he puts his hand to forehead— I can't bear to think of it. He sighs, and leaves.

Mrs L. gazes into fire for a few moments, then turns and looks around room.

Mrs L. So he did'nt read the note. I wonder what could have happened to it. A pause. Perhaps Irene destroyed it. No, that would'nt be likely; she knows how I value every scrap of paper. She looks up suddenly. Yes, yes, that's it; she thought it belonged to one of my plays, and she put it away for me. She tries to r rise, but is too weak. She staggers over to table and opens drawer; she smiles sadly. Here it is. My darling girl; how

little you dream what your little act of tidiness has done for your mother. She takes all papers from drawer; takes roll of paper she had tied up, opens them all, and takes them over to chair by fire. She sits down, and puts all papers in her lap. She fondles papers and looks at them, as if they were alive and could understand her. You won't need a hearse, but your daeth will be a happier one thanlittlr Isabel's, for your mother is with you to the end. God calls you— a sob— to him, and I am but His slave. I must obey; I must give you up, though it breaks my heart to do so. She takes them up, kisses them; she looks at them a few moments, then with a deep sigh throws the heap of papers in the fire. A few sheets fall on the floor. As she watches the flames, a dreadful look of agony is depicted on her face. She places her hand over her heart; and after a few pitiful struggles falls back in chair dead.

Church-bells are heard. Enter Dr L.

Dr L. goes to the window. Services for little Isabel. I am glad Harriet is asleep. He walks over to her, and looks at her; then as ~~he~~ if he did not believe his own eyes, bends down and looks into her face. He lifts up her handand exclaims in a tone of anguish! Great God, she is dead.

A pause. After kneeling a few seconds he raises his head and sees papers on the floor. He picks them up and looks at them, then looks into grate. I have tried to kill Nature, but I only succeeded in killing my wife and the mother of my children

He drops his head on her knees. Telephone bell rings; he does not answer. It continues ringing. He looks up. A call to a patient. I must tell them I can't go. He gets up, a picture of misery. Goes over to telephone and picks up receiver. In a chokedvoice! Hello. Who? Mrs Langley? No, Mrs Langley is— he stops short— no, I am Dr Langley, her husband. He

R He listens in great surprise. Repeats words he hears! Return manuscript? You are thinking of putting it on? He stops to think, then bends forward and answers! You can never put it on, for the writer and the play are both dead.

He drops the receiver, as he drops his arm on the table.

He drops his head on arm, sobbing.

CURTAIN.